

# GUIDE APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT

# 6

## Overview

There is no doubt that Stonington will continue to grow and change in the future. With the projected growth in population and housing units, coupled with Stonington's high quality of life, development will continue to occur.

How this growth and change is managed will have a large impact on the overall character and quality of life in Stonington in the future. In addition, this development has the potential to alter the fiscal balance in Stonington due to the varying ability of certain uses to generate tax revenue or require municipal services.

Because the villages are predominantly built-up (except for anticipated infill development and mill redevelopment), much of the future growth will occur in the outlying areas of the community. Unless this development is guided in appropriate ways, it may adversely affect Stonington's character and quality of life.

*Stonington needs to manage the fiscal impacts of growth while recognizing that residential 'sprawl' and commercial 'strip' development threaten Stonington's character and quality of life.*

Scenic Rural Charm



New Commercial Strip Development



*Economic development is an important issue in Stonington in terms of providing for a vital community and protecting community character.*

## **Encourage Appropriate Economic Development**

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At public meetings on the Plan, Stonington residents were very supportive of encouraging economic development in the community. Upon further examination, residents indicated that they wanted to enlarge the non-residential tax base to reduce taxes. This was considered to be a higher priority than providing employment opportunities or providing goods and services for residents.

However, residents also indicated that any economic development should also be compatible with, and enhance the overall character of, the community. To accomplish this, economic development activity should be focused in the existing villages, as discussed in Chapter 5, and at Stonington's three interstate highway exits.

### **Support the Villages**

While the villages represent major focal points in the community and support a range of business uses, the potential for major economic development in these areas is limited.

Nevertheless, the villages should continue to be supported and nurtured as economic focal points in the community (see Chapter 5).

### **Address the Highway Interchange Zone**

Available water and sewer combined with the adjacent highway infrastructure give the Highway Interchange Zone (at the interchange of Route 2 and I-95 at Exit 92) the greatest potential for new economic development in Stonington but the area also has a number of major environmental and regulatory constraints.

Due to this potential, a comprehensive study of the HI Zone was conducted, which established major principles for future development in the HI Zone:

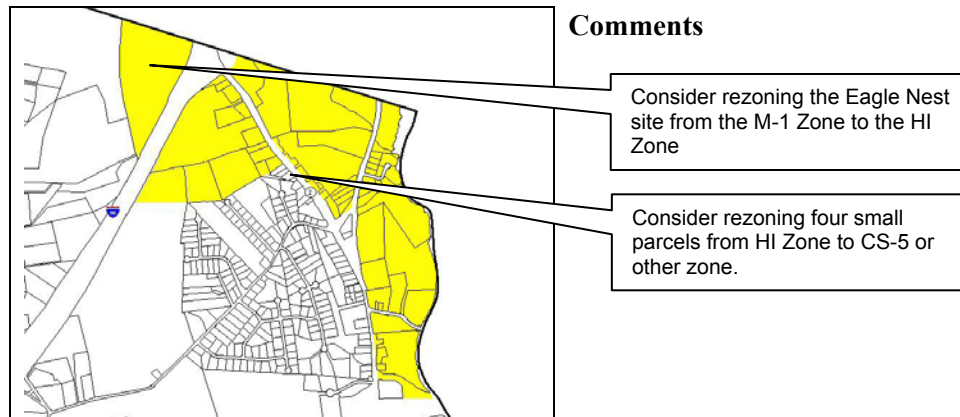
- increase the economic development potential of the area,
- protect important water resources,
- remove regulatory impediments to development while protecting the character of this gateway into Town, and
- manage access to major roadways and encourage consolidated development.

The recommended program includes the following components:

1. Refine the geography of the HI Zone
2. Revise the HI Zone and other Zoning Regulations
3. Develop plans for each sub-area of the HI Zone
4. Increase the utility of the land in the HI Zone

### ***Refine the Geography of the HI Zone***

The following map depicts recommended changes to the geography of the HI-Zone.



### ***Revise the HI Zone Regulations***

To achieve the main principles for the future development of the area, the HI Zone should be revised to:

- modify permitted and special permit uses,
- increase lot coverage and add an “effective impervious coverage” limit,
- reduce area and frontage requirements,
- protect natural resources, and
- encourage consolidated development and access management controls.

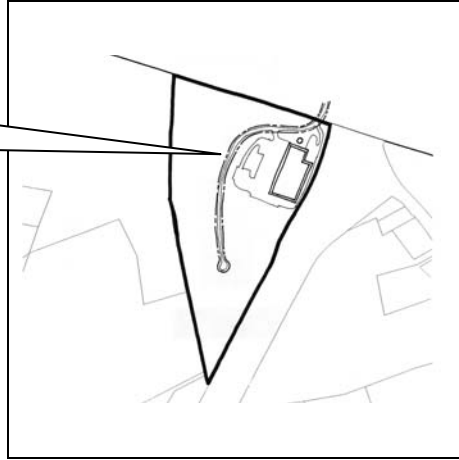
In the future, the Planning and Zoning Commission may wish to consider allowing additional types of development in the HI Zone if such uses provide net tax revenue to the Town and do not prevent other more economically beneficial uses from using these important sites (such as active-adult housing or mixed-use apartments).

To protect the character of the Zone as a gateway into Stonington, the Town should also create a Design Review Committee to draft and administer design guidelines, as recommended on page 75.

## Plans for HI Zone Areas

### Comments

New access road providing frontage for future development.



Area 1 (Eagle Nest Site) -- The 42-acre Eagle Nest site north of I-95 appears to have potential for further development. Rezoning this site to the HI Zone will increase the range of allowable uses, provide additional water quality protection, and encourage further development or redevelopment.

The current driveway (with wetland crossings in North Stonington already in place) could form the basis for approximately 1,800 feet of new public road providing access to the rear land.

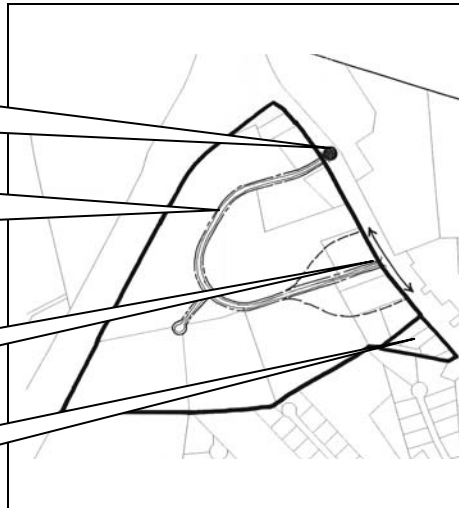
### Comments

Recommended required location of signalized intersection

Public road construction should be required in this general alignment

Possible location(s) of secondary access and egress

Consider rezoning from HI Zone



Area 2 (Northwest Corner) -- With almost 62 acres of land, this area has significant potential for development due to minimal environmental constraints and the presence of the largest undeveloped parcel in the Zone.

Key development considerations in this area include restricting access to Route 2 and requiring the construction of a public road to provide frontage and access for the rear land.

### Comments

Reserve land for possible future I-95 north-bound on-ramp

Recommended required location of signalized intersection

Protect wetlands and ponds (typical)

Require interconnections of sites and consolidated development (typical)

Acquire "excess land" from CTDOT

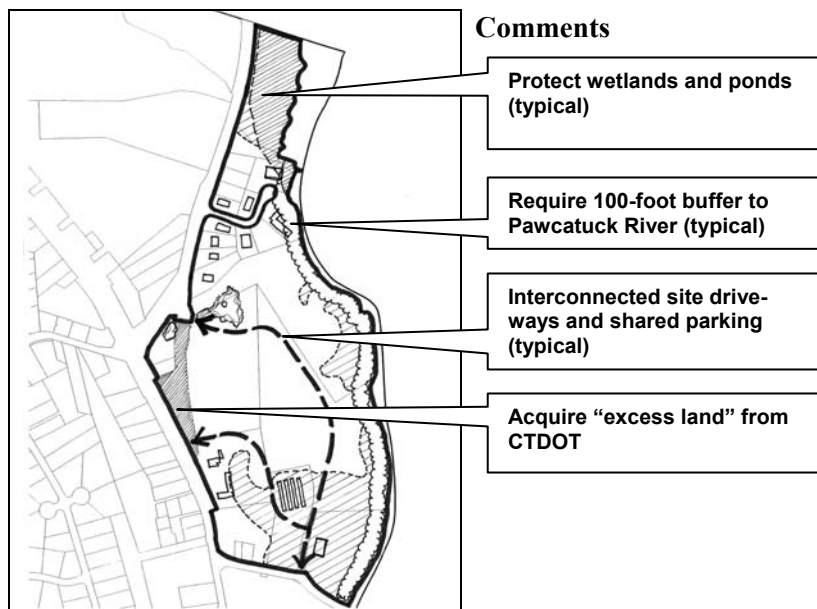


Area 3 (The Triangle) -- At 84 acres, Area 3 is the largest of the four development areas but is partially developed and contains several constraints that limit future potential.

Key development considerations in this area include restricting access to Route 2, requiring construction of a public road or interconnected driveways to provide access, and incorporating additional land (Aquarion and excess CTDOT land).

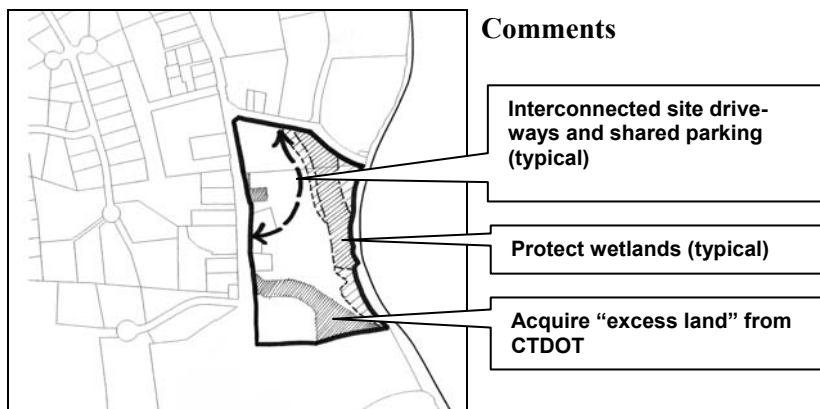
Area 4 (Northeast Corner) -- The northeast corner has for the most part been developed industrially.

Key development considerations include protecting natural resources and providing for a “riverway” trail along the Pawcatuck River, requiring interconnected driveways that will encourage consolidated development and manage access to major roadways, provide access for the rear land and manage access onto State highways, and incorporating excess CTDOT land.



Area 5 (Southeast Corner) -- The southeast area is the smallest of the five development areas.

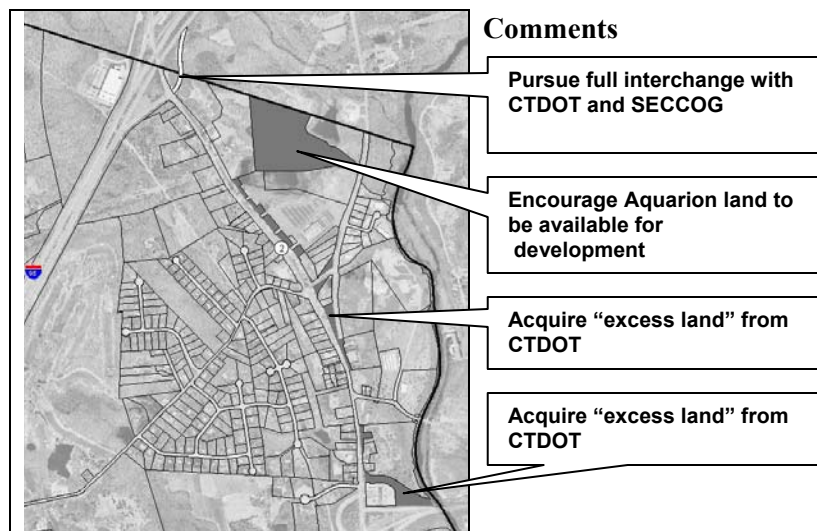
Key development considerations include protecting natural resources and providing for a “riverway” trail along the Pawcatuck River, requiring interconnected driveways that will encourage consolidated development and manage access to major roadways, provide access for the rear land and manage access onto State highways, and incorporating excess CTDOT land.



### *Increase the Utility of Land in the HI Zone*

The utility (and potential yield) of land in the HI Zone is limited by an irregular street line along Route 2, an unrealized Route 78 off-ramp, and the Aquarion Water Company’s sludge disposal facility. Stonington should:

- work with CTDOT to release “excess land” along Routes 2 and 78
- pursue with CTDOT and the Southeast Connecticut Council of Governments, the creation of a full interchange with I-95 and Route 2, and
- explore ways to include the Aquarion land in HI development.

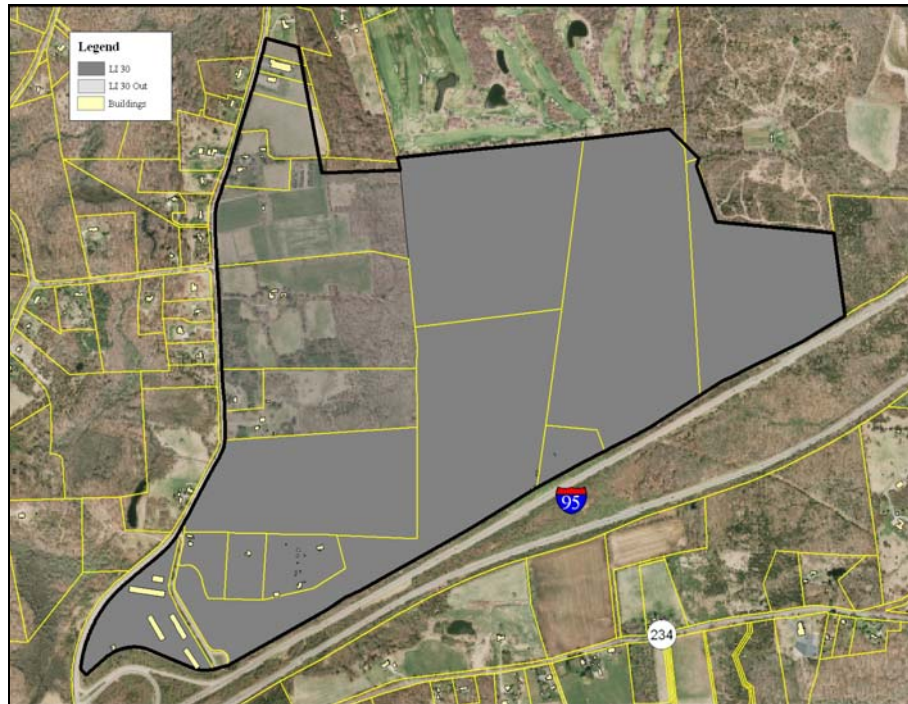




## Guide Appropriate Industry to Exit 91

The LI-130 zoned area at Exit 91 of I-95 benefits significantly from direct access to a full highway interchange but at the same time is limited by the lack of public water and sewer. The lack of water and sewer limits the number of employees that can be supported by on-site septic systems, discouraging most uses while encouraging low-intensity office or assembly/storage uses.

Exit 91



This area's strength is its full interchange, which makes it suitable for such uses as warehousing and distribution. By directing such uses to this area, additional heavy truck traffic can be avoided on Route 1, Route 2 and Route 27.

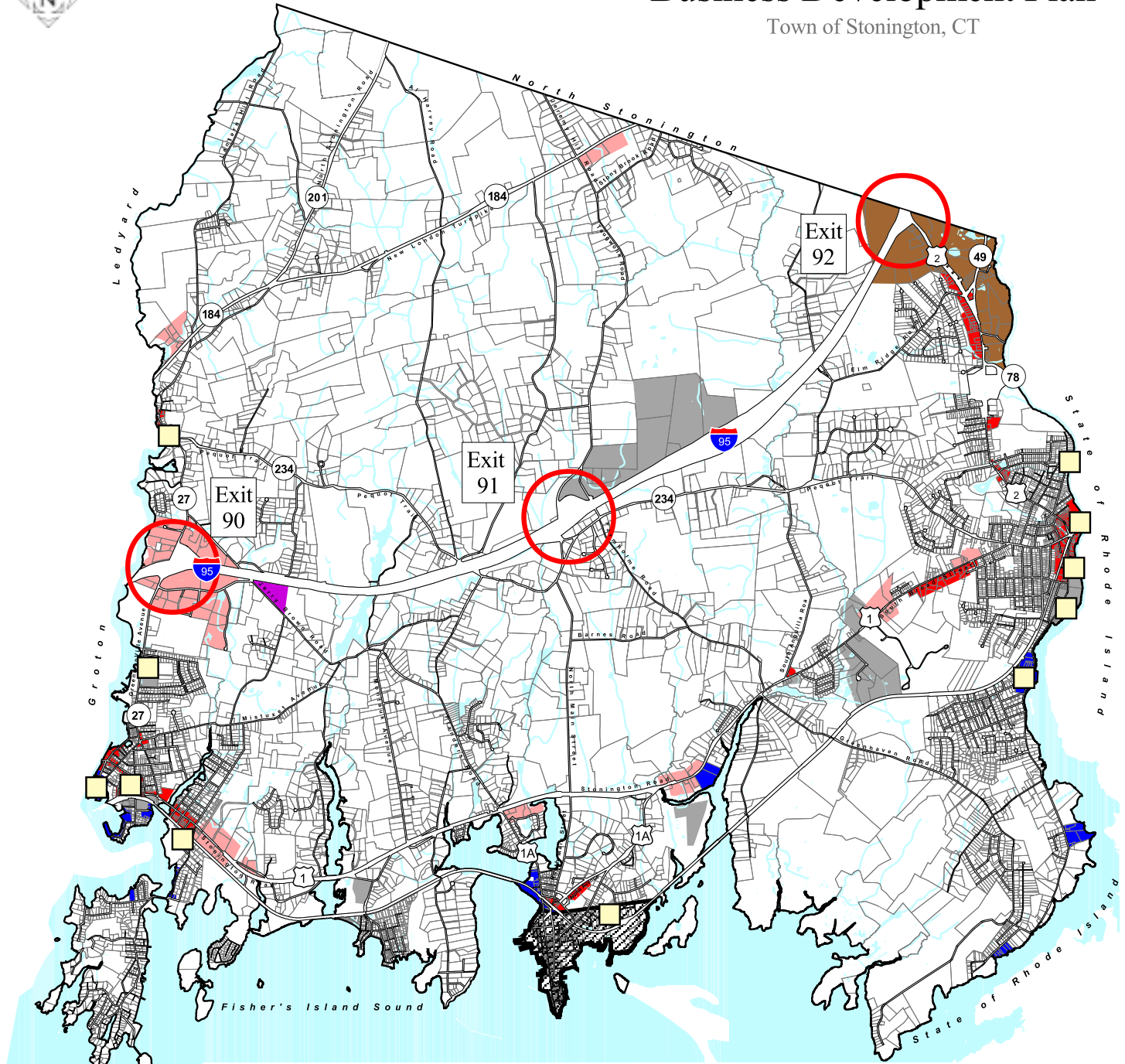
Non-labor-intensive light-manufacturing is also a suitable use for the area. Plastic component manufacturing is particularly suitable due to the presence of Davis Standard and other businesses in town whose primary business is the manufacturing and support of plastic manufacturing equipment. Such operations can sometimes run unattended in what is called "lights-out" manufacturing.

Because Exit 91 is a gateway into the rural heart of Stonington and scenic roads bracket the area, extra care should be taken to ensure that development is sensitive to the surrounding area. To minimize the potential impact of light industrial development on scenic Taugwonk Road, to take maximum advantage of the adjacent Exit 91, and to make the best use of land adjacent to I-95, it is recommended that the orientation of the LI-130 Zone at Exit 91 be reoriented in an east-west direction paralleling I-95 as depicted in the above map. Once land to the east of the current LI-130 Zone is rezoned to LI-130, the northern portion of the current LI-130 Zone should be rezoned to the RR-80 Zone in keeping with the surrounding area.










# Business Development Plan

Town of Stonington, CT



## Legend

- |   |   |
|---|---|
|  Neighborhood Business |  Business Park     |
|  Community Business    |  Marine Commercial |
|  Regional Business     |  Transition Area   |

 Stonington Borough

 Historic Mills

0 4000 Feet

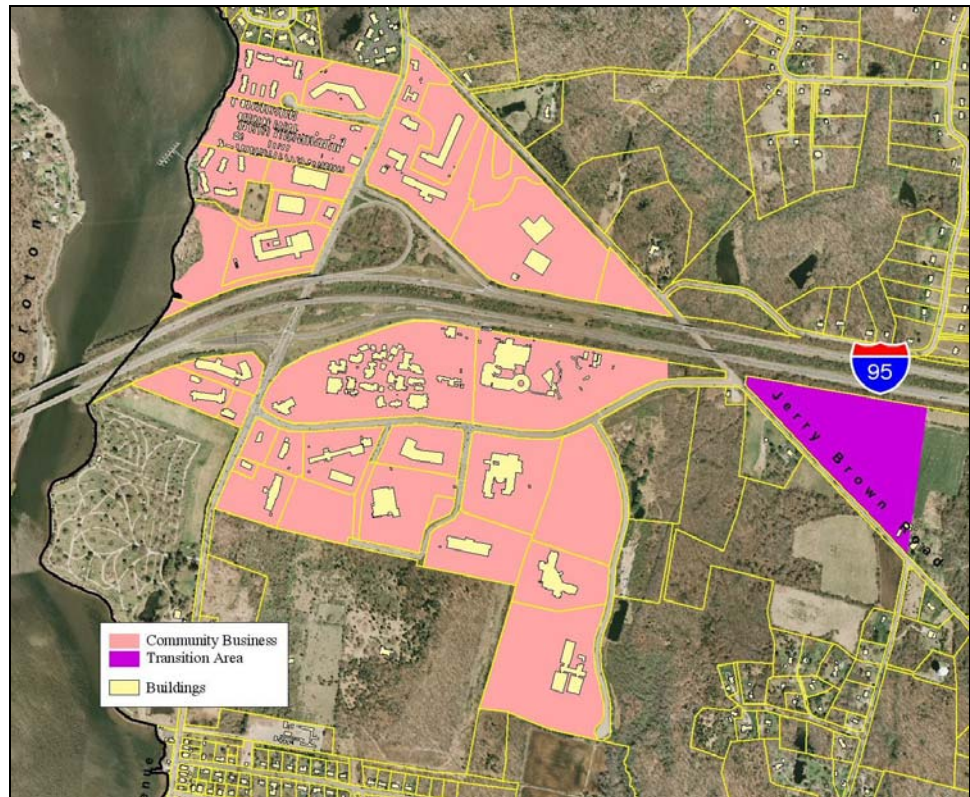


## Guide Appropriate Development to Exit 90

The close proximity of the Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration (Mystic Aquarium) and the Mystic Seaport to Exit 90 has acted as an economic engine for development around Exit 90 as well as in Mystic. Mystic Seaport, Mystic Aquarium, and the character of the villages and Borough in Stonington contribute to the overall economy of the community and support economic development in Stonington.

Due to the intensity of uses, potential for redevelopment and sensitivity of surrounding residential neighborhoods, it is recommended that a more detailed analysis of the Exit 90 area be undertaken in a manner similar to a village plan. Such plan should address appropriate land uses, define the boundaries of tourist and commercial activity, and address both vehicular and pedestrian circulation within the area.

Exit 90



### *Allow Limited Expansion of Commercial Activity*

With the exception of industrial zoned land in the southeast corner of the area, there is limited land available for commercial development without redeveloping existing parcels. One other area that may have additional potential for economic development is the land northeast of Jerry Brown Road and south of Interstate 95. The highway infrastructure is available and water and sewer infrastructure could be extended to support higher and better uses in this area.



Being located adjacent to a congregate housing facility to the south and low-intensity agricultural and residential uses to the east, special care is needed to avoid the expansion of more intense commercial uses found to the west. What is needed is a transitional zone that can act as a buffer between incompatible uses yet allow low-intensity economic development. Such a zone should allow professional offices as well as active-adult and other age-restricted housing that will generate additional taxes, require only modest services, and be compatible with surrounding land uses.

#### *Create a Maritime Historical/Educational Zone*

In terms of the Mystic Seaport and the Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration, these two uses have special situations that should be considered as part of the Plan. In the telephone survey, 91 percent of residents surveyed agreed that the Town should work with the Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration, Mystic Seaport and other institutions for everyone's mutual benefit.

The Mystic Seaport has been in existence since 1929, growing to become a pre-eminent museum of maritime history. The Mystic Seaport has also physically grown over time to encompass adjacent properties for parking, storage and research facilities. In doing so, it is now situated in two residential zones and one industrial zone, none of which is really supportive of a maritime museum.

To allow the Mystic Seaport to continue as a perpetual non-conforming use is to imply that it is not an appropriate use for its location and that its replacement with residential and industrial use would be preferable. Given that it embodies the essence of early Stonington and is a major economic engine for the Town, this is likely not the case.

The Mystic Seaport has had many discussions with the Town over creating a new Maritime Historical / Educational Zone to eliminate their non-conforming status and allow them the flexibility to adapt to change. Residents of the surrounding neighborhood have expressed opposition to these proposals, citing concerns over traffic and parking as well as noise and exhaust from idling busses.

To address both the Mystic Seaport's needs and neighbors' concerns, the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) should facilitate one or more workshops between the Mystic Seaport and neighborhood residents to openly discuss current problems and future plans in an effort to identify mutually agreeable solutions before a formal zone change application is made.

Given the importance of the Mystic Seaport to the Town, region and State, careful consideration of a Maritime Historical / Educational Zone that both legitimizes and regulates the Mystic Seaport is recommended. Due to the unique character of the Mystic Seaport and the difficulty in predicting future impacts, such a regulation might require Special Use Permits for significant new activities within the zone, allowing the PZC to exercise more discretion and receive additional neighborhood input in the future.

#### **Mystic Seaport**

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This Plan recommends the creation of a Maritime Historical/Educational Zone (with significant input from surrounding residents), to address the non-conforming status of the Mystic Seaport, but does not recommend or endorse specific regulatory language.

### *Consider Creating a Transportation/Visitor Center*

One of the biggest concerns regarding the Mystic Seaport and the Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration is traffic ‘congestion’ and, in the case of the Seaport, the noise and exhaust from idling busses. In the telephone survey, nearly two-thirds of residents surveyed agreed that traffic congestion around the Mystic exit (Exit 90) is a problem.

One possible solution would be to require busses to drop visitors off before parking at a remote transportation center to wait until needed. Such a transportation center could serve multiple functions such as providing convenience facilities for bus drivers while they wait or a visitor’s center where tourists can purchase attraction tickets and ride the Mystic jitney, leaving their cars behind.

This also has the potential to promote greater economic activity by integrating these uses more into the overall fabric of Mystic as a maritime village.

### *Create Commercial Development Boundaries*

Like the villages, firm boundaries should be established around Exit 90 as well as Exits 91, and 92 to encourage the development of available properties within them and protect surrounding neighborhoods from commercial encroachment by developers seeking cheaper land beyond the fringes of these areas.

### *Improve Signage and Streetscapes*

Stonington might also facilitate better identification through new signage to accommodate the institutional uses. The Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration and the Mystic Seaport (and the overall visitor experience) might benefit from an appropriately designed highway-oriented sign, shared by both entities to attract visitors.

Working in cooperation with the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) and the Town, the Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration and the Mystic Seaport could also develop a uniform design theme for “wayfinding” signs and other streetscape elements throughout the area to direct motorists and pedestrians to their destinations and help create a cohesive sense of place.

### *Consider Reconfiguring Coogan Boulevard and Jerry Brown Road*

Poor signage and complicated traffic patterns lead to confusion for tourists unfamiliar with the area, causing some to mistake the Olde Mistick Village shopping area for the Mystic Seaport or the village of Mystic itself. Directional signs and the configuration of intersections at Jerry Brown Road at Coogan Boulevard and Jerry Brown Road at Whitehall Avenue (Route 27) add to visitors’ confusion and create unnecessary traffic congestion.

Coogan Boulevard has been envisioned to become a true divided boulevard with bicycle and pedestrian amenities. The new design should incorporate the reconfiguration of Jerry Brown Road to direct northbound vehicles onto Coogan Boulevard where they can make right turns to access I-95. The northernmost leg

#### **Commercial / Institutional Signage**

The Planning and Zoning Commission is currently considering comprehensive amendments to the sign regulations that will address the signage problems and needs for both commercial and institutional uses, including wayfinding signage to guide visitors to destinations throughout Stonington.

of Jerry Brown Road should intersect Coogan Boulevard at a right angle, creating a “T” intersection that discourages northbound motorists headed for I-95 from continuing on Jerry Brown Road, only to turn left at an unsignalized intersection.

**Conceptual realignment of Coogan Boulevard at Jerry Brown Road**



The intersection of Jerry Brown Road at Whitehall Avenue (Route 27) is scheduled to be redesigned into a signalized intersection. An alternative configuration incorporating a roundabout would both calm traffic headed for Old Mystic and allow motorists on Jerry Brown Road to safely make left turns by circling the roundabout to the right.

**Conceptual Roundabout at Route 27 and Jerry Brown Road**



## Encourage Non-Traditional Types of Economic Development

Economic development such as office, retail and manufacturing uses have an obvious positive tax impact. Certain housing developments (such as congregate housing, assisted living, and multi-family developments with few bedrooms per unit) can also have a positive tax impact due to the absence of school children that account for approximately two-thirds of the annual Town budget. In addition to their net tax benefit to the community, such uses can also be used to meet housing needs, reinvigorate the mills, and add vitality to village centers.

Some forms of economic development have more indirect economic impacts. Tourism uses such as the Mystic Seaport and the Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration attract and support other forms of economic development in the community such as hotels and restaurants, generating new dollars in the local economy.

Enders Island & St. Edmunds Retreat is an institution that's unique character and mission are an asset to the community, in both public access and the services they provide. The island, retreat and surrounding community should be protected while enabling the best use of the facility.

Marine uses (such as marinas, boat building, and boat repair) can also generate net tax revenue to a community like Stonington. Such uses can also attract seasonal visitors who will support local businesses.

## Consider Local Perceptions

In the telephone survey, residents were asked to evaluate the mix of businesses in the community.

<b>Business Use</b>	<b>Too Many</b>	<b>About Right</b>	<b>Too Few</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
<b>Residents May Support More:</b>				
Corporate Offices	4%	43%	38%	15%
Light Industrial Uses	8%	44%	32%	16%
Small Offices	4%	64%	23%	9%
Restaurants	9%	43%	21%	27%
<b>Residents Seem Comfortable With:</b>				
Village Retail Stores	13%	67%	20%	0%
Large Retail Stores	19%	51%	26%	4%
<b>Residents May Not Support More:</b>				
Shopping Centers	21%	60%	18%	1%
Hotels	15%	73%	8%	4%
Tourist Attractions	19%	74%	6%	1%

From this analysis, it appears that residents would support the concept of corporate office and light industrial development in a business park-type setting. In



addition, they appear to support the concept of small offices and restaurants, possibly in a village-type setting or elsewhere.

It also appears that residents may be comfortable with the number and location of village retail stores and large retail stores.

Residents did not appear to support the development of additional shopping centers, hotels or tourist attractions.

#### **Office and Light Industrial Use**



#### **Implement Design Review**

How economic development occurs in Stonington may be as important as what type of economic development occurs. Nearly two-thirds of residents surveyed felt that the Town could do a better job of controlling the design of commercial development.

In recent years, much of the commercial development occurring around the country (and even in Stonington) can be characterized as strip development, catering to motorists and their vehicles. In addition, industrial development can sometimes consist of utilitarian metal buildings located in mixed environments, juxtaposed against residential areas, or at gateways into the community. This can undermine the community character that residents value so highly.

To address the design and appearance of commercial and industrial development, Stonington should consider creating a Design Review Committee (DRC).

The DRC would develop and consistently administer voluntary architectural design guidelines to encourage new development that is in keeping with the character of the community. The DRC would then review applications and forward their findings to the PZC to help guide their decisions.

There are a number of methods beyond design review that can be used to mitigate other negative impacts of business development such as unsightly parking lots, excessive stormwater runoff and glare from commercial lighting.

#### **Design Consistency**

The Planning and Zoning Commission and Department of Planning have experienced high rates of turnover in recent years, leading to inconsistency in both vision and interpretation of standards.

By establishing design guidelines administered by a Design Review Committee, a more consistent vision and long term consistency with respect to design can be achieved.

### **Economic Development Strategies**

1. Revise the HI Zone and other Zoning Regulations as prescribed.
2. Refine the geography of the HI Zone as prescribed.
3. Manage access to Routes 2 and 49 and encourage consolidated development.
4. Increase the utility of the land in the HI Zone by seeking the release of excess ConnDOT right-of-way and Aquarion Water Company land.
5. Demand from ConnDOT more direct access from Route 2 to northbound I-95 at Exit 92 due to its critical importance to the success of the HI- Zone.
6. Consider allowing additional uses in the HI Zone if such uses provide net tax revenue and do not conflict with other economically beneficial uses
7. Direct uses such as non-labor intensive light manufacturing, warehousing and distribution to Exit 91 to take advantage of direct access to I-95.
8. Reorient the LI-130 Zone at Exit 91 in an east-west direction by rezoning land to the east paralleling I-95 to LI-130 Zone followed by rezoning the northern LI-130 zoned land along Taugwonk Road to the RR-80 Zone.
9. Create a new Maritime Historical / Educational Zone, with significant neighborhood input that both legitimizes and controls the Mystic Seaport, allowing it to adapt to change.
10. Initiate a comprehensive area plan for the area surrounding Exit 90.
11. Create a new transition zone northeast of Jerry Brown Road and south of Interstate 95 to allow for low-intensity professional office and age-restricted housing uses.
12. Consider creating a transportation/visitor center to mitigate idling busses, promote area attractions and reduce dependency on private motor vehicles between I-95 and the village of Mystic.
13. Limit commercial sprawl with fixed growth boundaries around major commercial areas.
14. Work cooperatively to create unified directional signage and streetscape elements throughout tourist areas and improve pedestrian connections to the Mystic village center.
15. Allow the major institutional uses to share a common highway oriented promotional sign.
16. Reconfigure Coogan Boulevard into a true boulevard with bicycle and pedestrian enhancements.
17. Consider redirecting northbound Jerry Brown Rd. into Coogan Blvd.
18. Consider creating a roundabout at Jerry Brown Road and Whitehall Avenue to calm traffic and facilitate left turns.
19. Create a Design Review Committee to create and consistently administer design guidelines for business development.

## Manage Residential Growth

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Around the country, people are beginning to realize that the traditional zoning patterns of inflexible, large-lot zoning regulations has resulted in what people perceive to be "residential sprawl." This is an unflattering name for what has been recognized as the systematic consumption of rural land into characterless subdivisions that offer residents little more than privacy.

While Chapter 4 contains a number of recommended strategies to reduce the amount of raw land being consumed by residential development, increase the quality and quantity of open space preserved, and relate development potential to the ability of the land to support it, there are additional tools available to improve the pattern of residential growth.

### Adopt a Residential Density Regulation

Stonington should adopt a residential density regulation and rely on this system to manage the amount of future residential growth in outlying areas.

Density-based zoning replaces conventional minimum lot size requirements with a simple density factor that limits the total number of houses in a development. For example, the RA-40 Zone, which requires an approximately one-acre minimum lot size, could be modified to allow one dwelling unit per acre of land in a development. In this example, the number of dwelling units permitted in a density-based RA-40 development would be the same as in a conventional RA-40 development but the developer would have the flexibility to locate houses more carefully. Through this method, total growth can be anticipated and planned for and development patterns can be made more flexible.

Density-based zoning can also be combined with buildable area regulations (also described in Chapter 4) to reduce density in sensitive areas, thus alleviating development pressure on important natural resources.

The benefits of density-based zoning over conventional minimum lot area regulations include:

- lot sizes can be reduced without increasing the number of housing units;
- the total buildout potential of the Town can be moderated through adjustments in density;
- densities can be adjusted without creating non-conforming lots;
- the amount of infrastructure to be constructed and maintained can be reduced, thus reducing stormwater to be collected and treated;
- sensitive areas within a subdivision can be avoided and the impacts on larger sensitive areas such as aquifers and watersheds can be reduced;
- the amount of raw land consumed can be reduced as much as soil conditions will allow; and
- residents and wildlife are able to enjoy all of the benefits of the larger open spaces surrounding their homes.

*Residential growth has the greatest potential to affect community character and quality of life for Stonington residents.*

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### Bulk Requirements

Bulk requirements such as maximum building height, maximum lot coverage and minimum lot size are intended to control density, ensure adequate light and air, and ensure that the size and scale of structures are appropriate to the character of a zone.

Despite their effectiveness, bulk standards are an imperfect tool for controlling density because they create an inflexible pattern of development that consumes unnecessary amounts of undeveloped land.

## Current Status

The Conservation Commission is currently developing regulations for conservation subdivisions that may achieve many of the same benefits of density-based zoning within Stonington's conventional zoning pattern.

## Encourage Open Space Development Patterns

If a density regulation is used to specify the total number of housing units in a development (based on soil-types, existing zoning districts or some other factor), more attention can be placed upon overall development patterns.

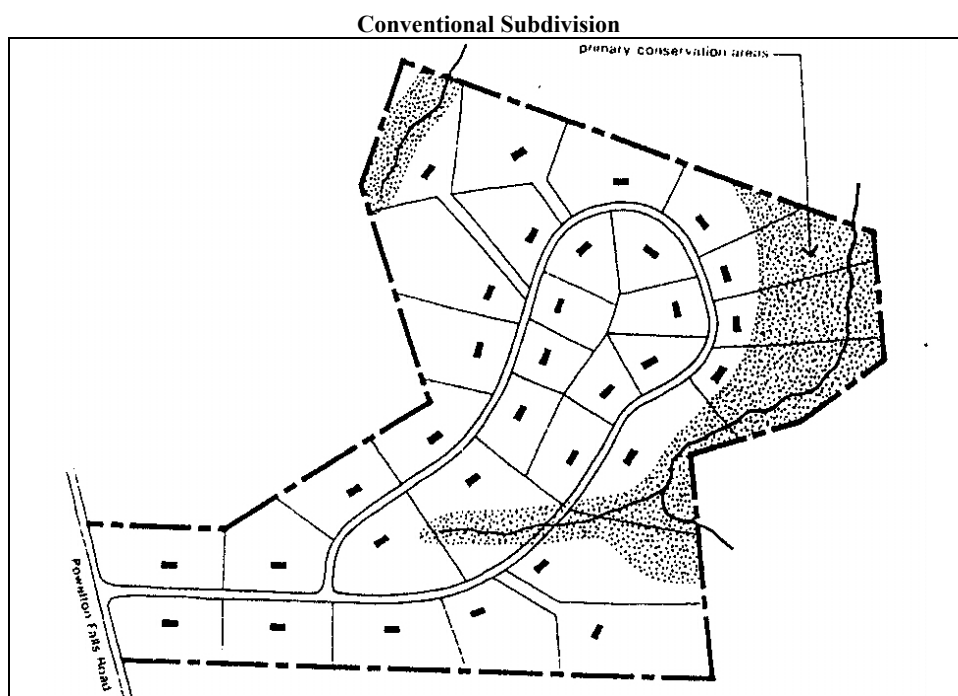
The problem experienced with conventional zoning regulations is that developers typically try to fit as many housing units as possible on a property in order to maximize revenue and profit from the development. This often frustrates the provision of meaningful open space and results in development patterns that do little for community character.

In a conservation subdivision, once the number of housing units is specified, a developer can design the development in a way that is more sensitive to site characteristics in order to maximize revenue and profit. In addition, more of the land can be preserved as open space which will benefit the buyers of homes in the new development and other residents of the community, as well as preserve important natural resources, and protect community character.

This type of development pattern can preserve rural streetscapes, protect natural resources, and result in more open space that benefits the community.

The following illustrations demonstrate how a conservation subdivision can preserve sensitive areas and scenic features such as wetlands and meadows while preserving more open space, without increasing the number of houses.

Noted planner Randall Arendt has developed a four step process for designing a conservation subdivision that is contrary to yet simpler than designing a conventional subdivision due to its flexibility.



Source: From Randall Arendt's *Growing Greener*



The first step in the process is to identify primary conservation areas such as wetlands, floodplains and steep slopes, followed by secondary conservation areas that are also worthy of protection such as scenic road frontages, meadows, mature stands of trees, etc. Under conventional subdivision development, protecting these resources and preserving open space is the last step in the process, resulting in minimal protection of natural and scenic resources and often meaningless open space.

The second step is to carefully locate houses with respect to conservation areas, while maximizing the benefits of those areas. Houses can be sited to:

- minimize disturbance of sensitive natural and scenic resources;
- preserve the most meaningful open space;
- maximize privacy with wooded open space to the rear;
- maximize views of meadows, common areas and water features such as ponds and streams; and
- provide a buffer between homes and a busy main road.

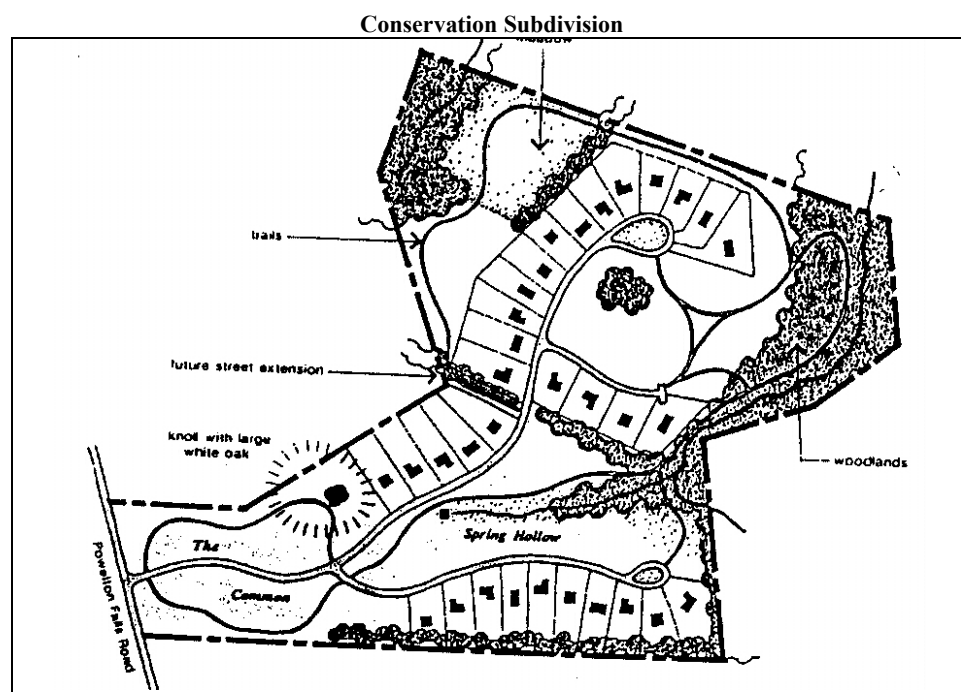
The final two steps are to design the streets to serve the homes and to draw lot lines around each home. Under conventional subdivision development, these are often the first steps in the design process.

To discourage the use of conventional development patterns in sensitive areas such as aquifers, watersheds and coastal management areas, conventional subdivisions could be required to secure Special Use Permits before being allowed instead of lower impact conservation subdivisions permitted by right.

Stonington should consider modifications to the coverage/bulk requirements to permit large-footprint homes, so prevalent in today's housing market, on smaller conservation subdivision lots.

### **Conservation Subdivisions**

The Town of Granby requires mandatory conservation subdivisions within a designated conservation zone that accounts for the bulk of the Town's residential area.



Source: From Randall Arendt's *Growing Greener*

## **Investigate Allowing Transfer of Development Rights**

Transfer of development rights (TDR) is the process of transferring the right to develop a piece of land from one parcel (the “donor” parcel) to another parcel (the “receiver” parcel). In doing so, TDR reduces or eliminates the development potential of the donor parcel (helping to protect natural resources or provide open space), and increases the development potential of the receiver parcel (perhaps enhancing a village or addressing housing needs in the community).

The Town designates specific areas called “sending zones,” where development rights can be transferred from in order to preserve more open space or discourage development of environmentally sensitive areas. The Town then directs the transfer of those development rights to appropriate “receiving zones,” where adequate infrastructure or better development conditions can support increased densities.

For example, a rural three-acre parcel in the GBR-130 zone has the potential to accommodate one house. Under TDR, the right to build that house might be transferred to a ten-acre “receiver parcel” in the RA-40 zone that is served by public water and sewer, allowing 11 houses to be built instead of the ten that zoning would normally allow. The three acre “donor parcel” can no longer be built upon, thus preserving it for agriculture, open space or other purposes. The impact of the 11<sup>th</sup> dwelling unit on the receiver parcel might be imperceptible, simply reducing the average lot size by ten percent.

To facilitate TDR, development rights can be purchased and held (“banked”) until a buyer can be found to purchase and use them in a receiver site, thus allowing open space or sensitive natural resources to be immediately preserved. While the TDR process can be difficult to administer and sustain, there have been successful programs. A case study of the program that has been used in Groton Massachusetts is provided on the facing page.

### **Residential Growth Management Strategies**

1. Adopt density-based zoning to allow more flexible development patterns to avoid environmentally sensitive areas and increase the percentage of dedicated open space.
2. Require Special Use Permits for conventional subdivisions in environmentally sensitive areas.
3. Consider allowing the transfer of development rights to redirect growth from sensitive areas to more suitable locations.

### **CASE STUDY - Transfer of Development Rights**

Groton, MA (pop. 9,547), 35 miles northwest of Boston, has had a TDR program since the early 1980s and has preserved more than 600 acres in just over two decades. The Groton, MA program is unique in that it has no defined donor or receptor zones, only donor criteria. Groton also does not have a bank for holding development rights, leaving developers to find and purchase their own.

In the late 1980s, Groton instituted a growth control program that is triggered when new housing construction exceeds 120 units over a 24 month period. Beyond this threshold, all subdivisions are capped at no more than 10 units over those same 24 months. This program has acted as a catalyst for the TDR program by allowing developers to exceed the cap and build two new dwelling units for every dwelling unit development right purchased, up to a maximum of six units built. The subtlety of this program is that developers are actually purchasing and then surrendering the right to build one dwelling unit for the privilege of building two deferred dwelling units that are already approved as part of an existing subdivision (thus reducing development potential by one unit).

Groton, MA development rights can also be used as part of a flexible cluster development, increasing the permitted base density by 25 percent. Interestingly, such a cluster development requires ten percent of the dwelling units to meet the State definition of affordable housing, effectively accomplishing multiple goals: protection of natural resources, preservation of open space, protection of the community's character, and the provision of affordable housing.

Stonington could implement a similar program, designating sensitive areas such as the aquifer protection zone as sender zones and areas with sewer service or good soils as receiver zones but it is uncertain whether the growth control program that drives the Groton, MA program could be implemented in Connecticut under the planning statutes.

## Address Changing Housing Needs

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In recent years, Stonington's housing supply has become increasingly oriented towards luxury single-family homes. However, changing demographics over the next 20 years suggest that some alternative housing types will be desired by Stonington residents in the future. In addition, the telephone survey revealed that 83 percent of residents felt that Stonington needs a variety of housing types.

In the telephone survey, residents were asked to evaluate the mix of housing types in the community.

Housing Styles	Too Many	About Right	Too Few	Don't Know
<b>Residents May Support More:</b>				
Starter Homes	3%	32%	<b>54%</b>	11%
Moderate Homes	14%	28%	<b>46%</b>	12%
Senior Housing	3%	38%	<b>43%</b>	16%
Active Adult 55+	4%	36%	<b>37%</b>	23%
Nursing Homes	4%	<b>40%</b>	32%	24%
Apartments	11%	<b>47%</b>	29%	13%
<b>Residents Seem Comfortable With:</b>				
Single-Family Homes	5%	<b>76%</b>	7%	12%
Condominiums	14%	<b>52%</b>	17%	17%
<b>Residents May Not Support More:</b>				
Luxury Homes	<b>54%</b>	41%	0%	5%

The results indicate that residents perceive a need for more starter homes, homes for moderate income households, as well as age-restricted housing, and may be supportive of efforts to provide housing in these categories. Residents also seem comfortable with the amount of single-family homes and condominiums but do not appear to be supportive of the continuing trend towards building luxury homes.

While little can (or should) be done to reduce demand for large luxury homes, the Town can take steps to encourage more diverse housing options in addition to these large luxury homes.



## Increase Age-Restricted Housing Options

Stonington's population aged 55 and older is expected to grow to 35 percent of the total population by the year 2020. According to the telephone survey results (tabulated below), 64% of Stonington residents aged 55 and older want to stay in their current homes and this trend is likely to continue.

**Next Housing Choice by Age**

<b>Next Housing Choice</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65-74</b>	<b>75-84</b>	<b>85 +</b>	<b>55+</b>
Existing Home	<b>71%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>56%</b>	23%	<b>64%</b>
Rental	7%	-	3%	-	3%
Condominium	7%	-	-	-	1%
Smaller Single-Family Home	9%	4%	-	-	5%
Life-Care Facility	-	9%	22%	-	7%
Affordable/Subsidized Home	-	4%	-	<b>77%</b>	8%
Senior Housing	3%	4%	6%	-	4%

To facilitate this, the Town should consider instituting an elderly tax relief program for age- and income-eligible residents, and anticipate expanding existing programs such as meals on wheels and dial-a-ride services to support them. Even with tax relief, encouraging "empty nesters" to remain in their homes can be revenue positive for the Town when compared to the expenditures generated by young families with children that might replace them in their single-family homes.

For those who choose to downsize or can no longer maintain their single-family homes, options such as active-adult and congregate housing should be encouraged, preferably within the villages where residents can be within walking distance of daily needs.

Stonington's accessory apartment regulations could also be made more flexible to create additional options for elderly or infirm residents.

A 300 unit assisted-living facility is currently under construction on Jerry Brown Road, which should help address the needs of elderly and/or infirm residents in Stonington and the region. At a cost of \$30 million, the tax benefits of the project are expected to be substantial.

As stated in Chapter 5, Stonington's many vacant and underutilized mills represent a significant opportunity to address many of the Town's housing needs and may be suitable for combinations of affordable, luxury, active-adult and other age-restricted housing for both rent and sale.

## **Affordable Housing**

According to the Connecticut General Statutes, affordable housing means housing that is:

- subsidized housing,;
- financed by CHFA or other mortgage assistance programs; or
- is deed restricted to affordable prices.

According to Section 8-30g of the Connecticut General Statutes, an affordable housing development is one in which 20% of the units remain affordable for 30 years to households earning 80% or less of the regional median household income without spending more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs such as mortgage, taxes, rent or utilities. Ten percent of the units must be similarly affordable to households earning 50% or less of the regional median household income

About 4% of Stonington's housing stock meets these criteria and this is below the State threshold of 10% affordable housing units in a community.

As a result, Stonington is subject to the State Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure which allows developers of affordable housing developments considerable regulatory flexibility as part of their development proposal.

## **Accommodate Affordable Housing**

As for many communities, the cost of land and the strength of the housing market are making it more difficult to provide affordable housing in general. This is made even more difficult in Stonington due to its desirability as a place to live

The survey results presented on the preceding pages show that residents believe there is a real need for both affordable and age-restricted affordable housing in Stonington.

Affordable housing is often misunderstood to be limited to low-income, high-density, government-assisted housing "projects." While such housing is affordable, there is a much broader range of affordable housing options ranging from elderly apartments to modest single-family starter homes, no different from many homes found in Stonington today.

Habitat for Humanity, churches and other organizations are able to construct small scale projects, often as small as one or two homes on existing vacant lots. Stonington could encourage moderate income housing on a similar scale by allowing development flexibility in return for providing one or more affordable units within a proposed development, similar to the program in Groton, MA.

Surprisingly, affordable elderly housing projects can provide multiple benefits for Stonington including:

- meeting the need for affordable housing;
- counting towards the State goal of 10% affordable housing units in Town;
- meeting the growing demand for elderly housing;
- allowing elderly residents to remain in Town, and
- generating more revenue than expenditures due to lack of school children.

As stated earlier, this type of housing should be located in or within walking distance of one of the villages to allow residents to access local amenities.

Another simple way to provide or retain affordable housing is through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The CDBG program allows the Town to create a low- or no-interest loan program for income-eligible residents to renovate their homes, thereby retaining and/or creating additional affordable housing units. An added benefit of this program is that it often eliminates blighted conditions due to a resident being unable to maintain their property.

Section 8-2i of the Connecticut General Statutes enables municipalities to require affordable housing units as part of every new housing development, which would distribute affordable housing units throughout the community.

Similar to mandatory open space set-asides (described in Chapter 4), the Town can also accept a fee-in-lieu of affordable housing that is placed in a housing trust fund to be used to create affordable housing elsewhere in the community.

This program can give the Town or a community housing organization (working in partnership with the Town) the ability to:

- locate affordable housing units in the most appropriate locations;
- control the density of affordable housing developments;
- control the design and aesthetics of affordable housing developments to make them compatible with surrounding neighborhoods;
- purchase land for affordable housing to be built by other housing organizations such as Habitat for Humanity;
- purchase blighted properties to rehabilitate them and guarantee their affordability through rent or deed restrictions; and
- leverage grants and loans available for building affordable housing.

#### **Housing Need Strategies**

1. Maintain or enhance elderly tax relief programs.
2. Encourage active-adult and elderly housing where appropriate.
3. Expand options for accessory apartments as elderly units.
4. Allow modest density bonuses or design flexibility in exchange for affordable units.
5. Seek additional Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and staffing to rehabilitate older homes and create or retain affordable units.
6. Consider requiring mandatory affordable housing within every residential development and accepting a fee-in-lieu thereof to be used to purchase affordable housing in appropriate locations.

## **Ordinance vs. Zoning Regulation**

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While Zoning Regulations are an effective tool for regulating land uses and their impacts, there are instances where a Town Ordinance can be more effective due to the subject matter and enforcement options.

Enforcement of a Town Ordinance can be more effective than Zoning Regulations because they can be enforced by the Police Department, Building Department, Health Department, etc. with financial and criminal penalties as opposed to a protracted process of Cease and Desist Orders and prosecution in civil court for zoning violations. Zoning enforcement is also generally limited to weekday hours, while many ordinances can be enforced by the Police Department 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

For these reasons, the issues of “hot bunking”, blighted properties, junk cars, excessive noise, and similar nuisances are best regulated by Town Ordinance.

## **Protect Existing Neighborhoods**

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Stonington has many attractive, livable neighborhoods, both within and outside of its villages. However, there are some issues that have the potential to undermine the stability of some of these neighborhoods, threatening both neighborhood character and quality of life.

### **Address the Hot Bunking Issue**

The casino and hospitality industries are contributing to the shortage of affordable housing in the region, creating a phenomenon called “hot-bunking,” which is a Navy term for sharing a bed on a rotating basis between shift-workers. Hot bunking is overtaking Stonington’s affordable housing stock by creating overcrowded conditions as well as parking problems and could eventually lead to residential blight. By adopting an ordinance to restrict dwelling unit occupancy to families consisting of persons related by blood, marriage or adoption, or a fixed number of individuals living as a family unit, the potential for hot bunking can be reduced. The boarding house regulations can also be strengthened and used to create more appropriate, affordable housing for transient casino and hospitality industry employees.

### **Address Blighted Conditions**

Property owners’ inability or unwillingness to maintain their properties has also led to isolated cases of residential blight. Creating and enforcing a blight ordinance can be an effective tool in controlling blight but doing so is a difficult and labor intensive task (requiring administrative staff) and should be considered carefully.

Stonington should evaluate the extent of blighted conditions in Town to determine whether a property maintenance ordinance is warranted. If the problem is limited to a few properties or areas, there may be more cost effective means of addressing the problem such as:

- organizing neighborhood cleanup programs;
- using CDBG loans in eligible areas to rehabilitate properties and create affordable housing units; and
- using affordable housing trust funds to purchase and rehabilitate properties, creating affordable housing units in the process (see preceding page).

### **Discourage Inappropriate Building Teardowns**

Another threat to Stonington neighborhoods is a phenomenon known as “teardowns.” A “teardown” is the inappropriate demolition of a serviceable building (as opposed to a blighted or nonfunctional building) to accommodate new construction and can occur for many reasons. Typically when land becomes far more valuable than the structures on it, it becomes ripe for a teardown.

For example, the former Monsanto mill was originally proposed to be demolished and replaced with condominiums before another developer agreed to renovate the existing buildings. The highly desirable neighborhood and waterfront views combined to make the teardown and replacement economical.

There are other equally attractive neighborhoods throughout Stonington where small homes and vacation cottages could be demolished for new larger homes that are out of scale and character with surrounding properties, perhaps even blocking scenic views. To reduce the threat of teardowns, the Planning and Zoning Commission should examine floor-area-ratios and other bulk requirements in areas susceptible to teardowns and strengthen them where necessary.

#### **Neighborhood Protection Strategies**

1. Adopt an ordinance to restrict dwelling unit occupancy to families or individuals living as a family unit.
2. Adopt boarding house regulations to create regulated, affordable housing for transient casino and hospitality industry employees.
3. Evaluate the extent of blighted conditions in town to determine whether a property maintenance ordinance is warranted.
4. Restore the CDBG loan program to rehabilitate older homes and eliminate blighted conditions.
5. Strengthen floor-area-ratios, building height and other requirements in areas susceptible to teardowns (see Demolition Delay Ordinance on page 45).

**CDBG Funds can be Used to Rehabilitate Blighted Properties**



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